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Watson's Art Journal.

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JAN. 18, 1868.

PUBLICATION OFFICE, CLINTON HALL, ASTOR PLACE.

INTELLECTUAL ADVANCEMENT OF MUSIC IN AMERICA.—GEORGE F. BRISTOW'S NEW ORATORIO.

The progress of a country must be judged not alone by the amount of political and personal freedom it insures to its people and its increased material wealth, but, also, by its intellectual development in the higher walks of art. In the mechanical arts, in the means of freeing the hands and multiplying the produce of their labor, America has taken the lead of all other nations.

In Literature, Painting and Sculpture she has made herself everywhere felt, and has given to the Old World as results of the lessons of the past, the fruits of her youthful vigor in characteristic productions, which bear the true American type. In these the advance is manifest, positive and acknowledged.

In Music, the eldest sister of the Arts, we may be said until recently only to have arrived at the practical point, for with but few exceptions we are wholly dependent upon foreign productions for the uses of our opera houses, our concert halls and our drawing-rooms. They form our tastes at our public amusements. They permeate our home-circles, and even the praises of God are sung in our churches to foreign tunes,—although of psalm tunes we manufacture, from foreign materials, thousands per year, the so-called new, not being good, and the good not being new.

So long as we were a people musically non-creative, a state of things such as we have described was inevitable; but we can now assert a claim to be ranked with other nations, as creators in that beautiful science, which is, of all the arts, the most general in its uses, and the most humanizing in its influences.

The progress to this point has been so gradual, that we can almost count its steps. In sacred music, the first pronounced attempt was a cantata, called "Eleutheria," by Geo. W. Curtis, which possessed merit, but not of a character sufficiently striking to render it standard.

Many years elapsed between the production of this work and the next, which appeared in the Symphonic form, and was from the pen of George F. Bristow.

Two Symphonies written by that gentleman were performed by our Philharmonic Society, with much eclat. Their merit was of a positive character; they were full of beauties, and displayed learning and a command of the orchestra, which compelled respect and admiration; but they were shelved for works far less deserving in a true musical sense.

In the Opera, the first notable production was "Leonora," by the late William H. Fry, a Grand Opera written in the Italian school, containing much that was admirable, and affording promise of higher excellence,—a promise which was fulfilled by a later work from the same pen. But for the bitter party opposition of the critical element, "Leonora"

would have certainly held possession of the stage, and we predict that before many years its revival will reverse the judgment of partisan opinion, and posthumous justice will be done to one, whose influence on the progress of the music of his period, has not been fairly estimated.

The second operatic effort was truly American, both in subject and treatment. It was called "Rip Van Winkle," the libretto of which was written by J. H. Wainwright, the music by George F. Bristow, both Americans, and may be justly claimed as the first American opera. It was produced at Niblo's by the Pyne troupe, and had a successful run of nearly thirty nights, a success which would have warranted its frequent repetition; but as opera, in the native tongue, has no permanent resting-place in our great city, the auspicious beginning, which should have resulted in giving us a native repertoire of operas, ended then and there. An attempt was recently made to revive it in an Italian dress, but the promise to produce it was not fulfilled, and it will have to bide the time, when some bold patriot shall dare to risk many shekels on an American work, in the midst of our Italian-Germanized society.

The next important work by an American composer, was the "Praise to God," an oratorio by George F. Bristow, who, by this composition, completed the circle of the great styles—the oratorio, the opera and the Symphony, proving in all his mastery of the schools.

"Praise to God" was a masterly work; serious and solid, somewhat too scholastic, perhaps, but marked by bold and brilliant treatment, chorally and instrumentally. It was performed twice and met with unqualified success, but the lukewarm taste of our public for such compositions offered no encouragement to risk the expense of repeating it.

Meanwhile, the musical under-current of song writing was rapidly developing, hand in hand with salon pieces for the piano-forte, and to-day we can point to writers in these minor but important branches of the art, whose works will bear comparison with the best in their styles.

But the most important musical work yet produced by an American is Mr. George F. Bristow's new oratorio "Daniel," which was recently performed by the Mendelssohn Union. We recognize the oratorio as the highest species of musical inspiration; for it comprises in its designs all the other great forms, the symphony, the recitative, the scena, and the concerted element. Its expression is of prayer and admiration; of warning, of faith, of hope and consolation. It is the outward expression of inward belief; it is, in its perfect form, the noblest and the most spontaneous tribute which genius can offer at the shrine of the Creator. It is a work which cannot be taken up idly; to exclude the secular cadence, the passionate expression of mere human love, and still to invest the work with the graces of melody, without which music is worthless, requires the strictest isolation from worldly associations—requires that the soul should be permeated by a deep sense of Divine love and mercy, and be sustained by an humble and earnest belief. Sacred inspiration can be derived from no other source: mere musical instinct could not produce a work of that character which would last for a day. The uncompromising, earnest faith of Handel gave us the "Messiah" and the Israelites in

Egypt; the pure, tender faith of Haydn, the Creation!

But to these conditions must be added the strictest rules which hedge round such compositions: the stern cadence; the Doric simplicity of design; the fugue form, which, in its mathematical exactness and symmetrical perfection, seems a tonal type of the unerring systems of the creator—all these trammel the free flow of thought, and must be subjected and moulded by an inspiration which rises superior to them all, and has its origin in the first instinct of a created being, to lean upon and to worship the infinite, which he knows not, but which speaks to him through every inner sense and through every outward and visible thing.

Such are the conditions necessary to produce so great a work, in all the essential points, as the Oratorio of Daniel, by Mr. George F. Bristow.

It is our intention in this article, simply, to indicate the progress of the musical art in this country, up to the point of the development of the high creative Faculty, by which alone we can assert our intellectual equality, with the intelligence of the old World. The work shall receive the attention which its importance deserves, after its second performance, which takes place on the 30th of January. This much we will say: comparing the Oratorio of Daniel with his previous works, secular and sacred, we find in it a greater maturity of thought and style; a greater freedom in handling his material; a broader manner and a more impassioned expression; a finer and yet bolder sense of coloring, vocally and instrumentally, and, above all, a deep felt earnestness, which gives vital force to every phrase of the composition, and which is the inspiration he sought for, and found it at the only source from which it flows.

ENGLISH OPERA—ACADEMY OF MUSIC.

The production for the first time in this country of the latest operatic work of Wm. Vincent Wallace, attracted a large audience on Monday evening last, at the Academy of Music. We knew the music of "The Desert Flower" well, and while recognizing its many beauties, we knew that it was the weakest of the operatic works of its great composer. The libretto, having the advantage of being written by two people, is more stupid than the work of one man could have been. There is not a respectable character in the plot. The white woman is a nonentity; the Indian woman is a fierce virago, and is therefore appropriately called "The Desert Flower," meaning a tiger-lily, we presume; the hero is a false knave; the comic man, a buffoon; and the villain is a contemptible rascal. To treat such characters musically must have taxed the endurance of the composer, as from them hardly a single inspiration could have been drawn. Wallace did with it all that could be done, redeeming it partially by some lovely morceaux, and by some masterly dramatic writing. All the ballads possess points of beauty, but the leading subjects, though smooth and flowing, are wanting in freshness and individuality. They are, however, worked up with rare artistic skill, which rounds them off most effectively. They bear the stamp of an accomplished musician, but they are not the offspring of his genius. They are, however, such as the publishers like, for they are calculated to

command a large sale. The arias entrusted to the "Desert Flower" are brilliant and ingenious, the "Wood-bird's song" being especially charming. The finale of the second act is fine in subject and in treatment, and is broadly dramatic. It is worthy of being transferred to a more sensible plot, for preservation, so prominent are its beauties. The trio in the first act is one of Wallace's best efforts in concerted writing, second only to the trio in *Maritana*, "Turn on, old Time." The trio and chorus in the third act is also extremely beautiful, and worthy of Wallace's best moments. The work throughout is beautifully instrumented; many curious and capital effects are produced, especially by the use of the reed instruments. The orchestration is so individual, that the fine points would come out, despite of the miserable performance vouchsafed by the orchestra, which really offered no redeeming feature.

The music of "Oanita" is far beyond the range of Miss Richings' powers; it requires light and delicate execution, and a certainty of intonation, neither of which was exhibited by that lady. We have rarely heard a worse failure in attempting to interpret an author's ideas. In the plainer and more emphatic portions of the music, she succeeded much better, but the role is quite unsuited to Miss Richings' style.

Messrs. Castle and Campbell sang well generally, in some places beautifully, but it was evident that they were not thoroughly at ease in the music. Their rendering of the two ballads, "Tho' Born in the Woods," and "The Desert Waste," must be specially marked for commendation. Mr. Seguin did all that could be done with a very ungracious part. "The Desert Flower" was put on the stage in a very poor and inefficient manner, as is usually the case with all English operas. For instance, in "The Lily of Killarney," one of the Irish landscapes revelled in a luxurious growth of the cactus and the palm tree. It is this total disregard of the proprieties, added to weak orchestras and choruses, which makes all attempts to popularize English Opera abortive. There can be no hope of permanence in such enterprises, until there is a theatre especially devoted to them.

THE ART JOURNAL RIGHT AS USUAL—LISZT AND CHICKERING.

Some months ago we published a paragraph from an interview with Liszt, to the effect that he desired to visit America for three reasons—one, to see Niagara; two, to see the prairies; three, to try the Chickering pianos. This anecdote was derided by those in the interest of the Steinway house, and even the mercurial Oscar Commetant roared a ghastly laugh over it, in *Le Menestrel*, in Paris. He laughs best who laughs last, and our turn to laugh comes about this time.

In the whole of this piano controversy, we have not put forward one statement that was not susceptible of proof. Time has justified every statement we have made; one by one the assertions made by the Steinways have fallen to the ground. All the falsifications well and liberally paid for, but the denials to all come under the signatures of all the parties implicated, which could not be denied, and thus the whole bolstered up reputation fell to the ground, and the ART JOURNAL was justified at all points. It is of course eminently satisfactory to us, although we have no personal interest in the matter,

for we are outside of both parties, and it is well known that only those who are inside the "rings" come in for the spoils after the lions are glutted. The last point of justification needed, will be found in the following letter from the Abbe Liszt to Chickering & Sons. It needs no comment from us, the context will speak for itself, e. g.:

[TRANSLATION.]

Messrs. Chickering: It is very agreeable to me to add my name to the concert of praises of which your pianos are the object. To be just, I must declare them perfect, and *perfectissimus* (superlatively perfect).

There is no quality which is foreign to them. Your instruments possess in the supreme degree, nobility and power of tone, elasticity and security of the touch, harmony, brilliancy, solidity, charms and prestige; and thus offer a harmonious ensemble of perfections to the exclusion of all defects.

Pianists of the least pretensions will find means of drawing from them agreeable effects; and in face of such products—which truly do honor to the art of the construction of instruments—the role of the critic is as simple as that of the public; the one has but to applaud them conscientiously and with entire satisfaction, and the other but to procure them in the same manner.

In congratulating you sincerely upon the great and decisive success obtained at the Exposition at Paris, I am pleased to anticipate the happy continuation of the same in all places where your pianos will be heard, and I beg that you accept, sir, the expression of my most distinguished sentiments of esteem and consideration.

(Signed)

F. LISZT.

Rome, December 26, 1867.

WM. KNABE & CO.'S PIANOFORTES.

The long and widespread reputation of the firm of Wm. Knabe & Co. renders any commendation from us almost a work of supererogation, but the production of their new scale Grand, and Square Pianos, offers an opportunity of which we gladly avail ourselves. We have examined specimens of both classes lately, and find them beautiful instruments in every respect, presenting great and appreciable improvement over those of their previous make. The Grands have a fine out-speaking tone; the quality assimilating somewhat to that of Erard's, which seems, by general consent, to be the standard tone for Grand Pianofortes. It is full, free and powerful, and is remarkable for its equality and brilliancy. Such qualities cannot fail making them telling and effective concert instruments. Their touch is admirable, combining delicacy and power in a high degree, affording the player facilities for the expression of every shade of sentiment. They are among the finest Grands in the country.

Their Square Pianos have a peculiarly beautiful quality—a quality which differs from that of other makers, and is indeed a specialty of their own. It is sympathetic and has a full singing power, affording a sostenuto which is as pleasing as it is effective, the development of which has brought the piano nearer to a perfect instrument than was ever achieved in the past. It is sweet and brilliant, and has all the power which legitimately belongs to a square instrument, above which the rest is all noise. The tone is fine in every respect, and in design and finish, ex-

terior and interior, they are beautiful and reliable. Their now completed Factory is one of the largest in the world, and the number of instruments they turn out, is not exceeded, we understand, by any American manufacturer. When public opinion shall have relieved us of the tyranny which subverts public places to selfish personal uses, and when piano-players shall cease to have owners, we shall, perchance, hear these fine instruments at our concerts.

WHAT THE THEATRES ARE DOING.

Up to the time of our going to press the White Fawn has not been presented to the New York public. The reason why is simply that the management has taken a heavier task upon its hands than it can perform in the stipulated time. To drill five or six hundred people into shape for a gigantic piece like this is no child's play. These people, since the theatre closed, have fairly lived in it; a rehearsal going through the entire night being a matter of course, that crowd going off at daylight and the second relay for the day's practice coming on at 8 o'clock, A. M. This has been going on without intermission for the last seven days, and the consummation is promised for Friday night of this week, too late for us to announce the result.

The principal item of the week has been the re-appearance on the stage of his own theatre of Lester Wallack in Planche's charming comedy of the "Captain of the Watch," and Morton's comedy of "Woodcock's Little Game." It is useless at this late day to enter upon a criticism of Mr. Wallack's acting, or count up his stage appearance. It is enough simply to state facts, and these facts are that he has lost none of that ease and grace that made him so great a favorite in the past, and the public testify to it by crowding the house to repletion nightly and receiving him with the old enthusiasm. Last Monday, his first night, was an ovation of which he might well feel proud. Every seat and every inch of standing room was filled. The audience was fashionable and appreciative, and upon his entrance received him more than warmly, to which, at the end, he responded by coming before the curtain and making a short and pleasant speech.

We presume there will be little to record for the next three months as connected with this house but a continued series of crowded houses made by Lester Wallack's success.

At Banvard's Theatre they have produced a new spectacle entitled "The Frost King," rather a cold subject for this time of the year, but the name of which has not deterred the public from an appreciation of its merits. The piece is well put upon the stage and cleverly done, and but for the fact that the management does not think it worth while to let the public know this fact by advertising, we have no doubt the house would be crowded every night. The house is comfortable, the entertainment good, and the prices so extremely low that every seat should be filled every night.

The Olympic announces its last nights for "Midsummer Night's Dream," but does not announce what follows it, but rumor says something good.

The New York Theatre announces a dramatization of the Pickwick Papers, to be produced only on alternate nights with "Under the Gaslight," which latter has certainly